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ABSTRACT

This booklet, one of a series featuring the Canadian provinces, presents a brief overview of British Columbia and is suitable for teacher reference or student reading. A discussion of the province's history includes the early European explorers, Indian natives, and later fur traders and settlers. The building of the transcontinental railway, entry into the Canadian Confederation, and British Columbia's immigration patterns are briefly described. Also discussed are the province's multicultural population, geographic location, climate, forestry, mining, agriculture, fishing, energy, industry, transportation, international trade, government, education, arts and culture, and recreation. The economic importance of the province's mineral industry, mixed livestock and crop-farming, fishing, hydroelectric power, manufacturing, and international trade is also emphasized. The development of British Columbia's government is traced and its current policies are mentioned. In the final section, the province's labor force, educational facilities, cultural events, and recreational facilities are described. In addition, a simple map showing Canada's major cities and provinces is provided. (LH)

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British Columbia

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One of the earliest of the European explorers of Canada s west coast described what he saw there as "dreary" and a "glooming scene". Simon Fraser could scarcely have envisaged that 200 years later the forbidding forests and coast of British Columbia would be described as Canada's lotus land and become a youth, tourist, business and retirement mecca for thousands of Canadians.

When the European explorers, sailors and fur traders — Juan Perez, James Cook, Simon Fraser, David Thompson, Alexander Mackenzie — charted the B.C. coast and interior from 1774 to 1800, the land of the tall pines already had long-established residents but no written history. It is probable that the West Coast Indians were the last of the "native" people of North America to arrive from Asia across the Bering Strait land bridge about 10,000 years ago. Made up of several linguistic and cultural groups, they numbered approximately 80,000 at the time of the earliest European contact. The Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Bella Coola, Kwakiutl, Nootka and Salish enjoyed a high standard of living, based on a wealth of forest and sea resources. According to one historian, they also had "perhaps the richest culture of all the hunting peoples of the world".

For years the West Coast Indians had been fishing the sea for salmon and other species of fish and felling giant cedars for their buildings, canoes, artistic woodworkings and garments (woven from the shredded bark). Their ingenuity in living with their environment was a boon to the early European explorers, who acquired valuable skills and knowledge from the Indians.

The European explorers were soon followed by fur traders and an important maritime fur trade developed. This led to a period of international tension which was allayed by the Nootka Sound Convention, signed by representatives of Britain and Spain in 1790, making the northwest coast open to all nations.

The competition between the two great fur-trading companies, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, meanwhile was furthering land exploration east of the Rockies. In 1793, while Captain George Vancouver was making detailed maps and charts of the northwest coast, Alexander Mackenzie of the North West Company became the first European to make a land crossing of Canada to the Pacific Ocean. His fellow Scots — and fellow Nor'westers — Simon Fraser and David Thompson also reached the coast, by way of the Fraser and Columbia Rivers respectively.

American maritime fur traders were also active on the coast. Territorial rivalry between the Americans and the

British was calmed somewhat in 1818 by a "joint occupancy" agreement. An active campaign to establish trading posts at strategic locations was waged by the Hudson's Bay Company (which had amalgamated with the North West Company in 1821) to check American intrusion and to legitimize the British territorial claim. The "Oregon question", however, was settled (to the advantage of the Americans) by the treaty of 1846, which extended the eastern boundary westward along the 49th parallel.

In order to assert British sovereignty, Vancouver Island was established as a British colony in 1849. Nine years later gold was discovered in the Fraser and Cariboo areas, attracting thousands of fortune-seekers, most of them Americans. On the instigation of the Governor of Vancouver Island, James Douglas, the British Columbia mainland was proclaimed a colony in 1858. Douglas was made governor of both colonies, which were eventually united in 1866. British Columbia was gradually being transformed from a commercial outpost to a link in the chain of the British Empire.

The interior of B.C. was opened up by the Cariboo Trail, a 645-km (400 mile) wagon road 5.5m (18 feet) wide, joining Yale (at the head of the Fraser River navigation) to Barkerville. Built between 1861 and 1868, the road plied through mountains and across raging rivers and deep ravines. Prior to its construction, the only way into the interior was along forest trails and canoe routes. The great mountain barrier between the colony and the east remained, however, isolating B.C. from its sister British colonies.

Meanwhile, the dream of a transcontinental link by road or rail persisted and soon became the key for union with the Canadian Confederation. A determined pro-Canada group was led by an eccentric journalist with the adopted name of Amor de Cosmos. A delegation from B.C. eventually went to Ottawa in 1870 and in 1871, the union was sealed. A cornerstone of entry into Confederation was the promise of a transcontinental railway.

At the time of its entry into the Canadian Confederation in 1871, British Columbia's population was largely native Indian and British. But the coastal enclave was also attracting people from across the Pacific. The Chinese first came to mine for gold in 1859. Thousands came in the 1880s to work as labourers in the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Japanese began to arrive in the 1890s, becoming merchants and fishermen. Government policy restricted Asian immigration and these two groups encountered much discrimination over the years. During the Second World War, many Japanese were interned and their property confiscated.

Canadian immigration laws, however, have gradually been liberalized in the past 20 years: in 1977, total Asian immigration to Canada was 31,368, compared with 40,748 from Europe. Today most Asians in British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada are second- or third-generation, maintain strong cultural organizations and have entered freely into Canadian business and professional life. The Chinese population of Vancouver is about 70,000. The Japanese contribution to Canadian society has been, to quote Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, "far in excess of their numbers."

As the name of the province implies, the great majority of British Columbians — nearly 60 per cent — are of British origin. The English established the colony's institutional underpinnings — in law, administration and social leadership. They also became dominant in labour and capital, having been instrumental, for example, in the formation of the British Columbia electric Railway Company, the forerunner of B.C. Hydro. The contributions of the Scots range from exploration and settlement to business, administration and education. Harvey Reginald MacMillan who built the largest forest-products corporation in Canada, was an archetypal Scot. Many Irish immigrants worked as farmers or artisans, or as "navvies" on the railways and roads that were so important in the growth of the province. Politics and the law also attracted many Hibernians and sons of Hibernians: Sir Richard McBride was premier of British Columbia from 1903 to 1915.

The Indian population of British Columbia, which began to decline with the arrival of the first European settlers, is enjoying new strength. It is growing in numbers and has developed strong native organizations which are vigorously challenging the *status quo*, particularly as it affects treaty rights and land claims. This new determination on the part of Indians has also coincided with a renaissance in their cultural and artistic expression.

Two other groups whose numbers and contribution to the province are considerable are the Germans and the Scandinavians. The former came in great numbers at the time of the gold rush and again during the 1920s. Settlers from five Scandinavian countries have, for their part, adapted readily to B.C.'s resource economy. The greatest immigration from Scandinavia took place during the period from the late 1880s to the late 1920s.

Today the population of the province is 2,544,400, most of which is concentrated in the southern coastal area around Vancouver and the provincial capital of Victoria (on Vancouver

Island), the central Fraser Valley (eastward from Vancouver) and the Okanagan Valley in the interior. The metropolitan areas of Vancouver and Victoria comprise nearly 60 per cent of the province's total population.

The concentration of population is in great measure a reflection of the physiographic and climatic profile of B.C. The province is a sea of mountains. Over 90 per cent of the land area is mountainous and non-arable. The principal farmland, occupying 5 per cent of the total area, is nestled between mountain ranges; it extends east from the Fraser Delta in the south, along the 800-km-long Interior Plateau, and comprises the northeast corner of the province, where it is part of the Great Central Plains of North America. The major mountain chains are the Coast Mountains, which extend northwesterly and average 160 km (100 miles) in width, and the Rockies, which separate B.C. from the province of Alberta. The coast has a maritime climate with abundant rainfall and mild temperatures, while the interior has a predominantly continental climate.

If it was furs, fish and gold that attracted B.C.'s first immigrants, it has been forestry that has sustained the province's development. British Columbia has over 520,000 km^2 (200,770 square miles) of forest land which covers 55 per cent of the province's area. The forest industry started to grow after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885. It has grown steadily since then to the point where it now generates about 50 cents of every dollar earned in the province.

In 1978, 10 of the 11 companies in the $4.5-billion forest industry reported record profits. In Canada as a whole, paper and forestry companies shared the sharpest gain in after-tax profits among manufacturing industries in 1978. The principal export markets for lumber and pulp and paper products are the United States (where 55 per cent of exports are destined), the European Community (25 per cent) and Japan (10 per cent). The industry employs an estimated 85,000 people (or 9 per cent of the employed labour force). The forests contain over 7.9 billion cubic metres of merchantable timber (97 per cent softwood), of which the principal species are hemlock, spruce, balsam, lodgepole pine, red cedar and Douglas fir. Virtually all the forest land in B.C. is owned or administered by the provincial government. Many of the world's major newspapers are printed on B.C. paper.

The area of British Columbia within the Canadian Cordillera boasts a variety of minerals and is the centre of a well-established industry. From the inception of the mineral industry, the value of minerals produced has exceeded $15 billion — $1.8 billion in

1978 alone. The four major metals in order of importance are copper, molybdenum, zinc and lead, which represent over 40 per cent of the total value of mineral production in the province. Despite fluctuations in the industry, the value of mining has been increasing at an average annual rate of 15 per cent. Oil and natural gas production facilities are also to be found in northeastern B.C., where proved reserves of crude oil are estimated to be 20.3 million cubic metres and proved reserves of gas, 190 billion cubic metres.

British Columbia agriculture is a virtual microcosm of Canadian agriculture. It includes dairying, cattle ranching, poultry raising, and the growing of tree fruits, vegetables, berries, grapes, bulbs and ornamental shrubs. Complementing these specialized activities is widespread mixed livestock- and crop-farming. The industry, confined as it is to 5 per cent of the total provincial land area, ranks fourth behind forestry, mining, and tourism. Farm cash receipts totalled an estimated $555 million in 1978. Dairying and the production of livestock and related products are the most important sections in the agricultural economy.

The establishment of a 200-mile fishing zone off Canada's coasts in 1977 was a great boon to the B.C. fishing industry, already the most valuable in Canada. The wholesale value of its fisheries products today is over $300 million. Of the over 20 species of fish and marine animals harvested off B.C. coasts, the single most valuable is salmon, which accounts for over 60 per cent of the landed and wholesale values of fisheries products. Next to salmon, the most important fishery in B.C. is roe herring. B.C. has about 12,000 fishermen, working from 6,000 boats, and supported by 6,000 shoreworkers.

The coastal fishing grounds suffered for a long time from undue exploitation — for the most part by large foreign fleets. The 200-mile limit, careful conservation programs and increased consumer demand, however, have contributed to a remarkable resurgence in the industry.

British Columbia derives over 90 per cent of its electricity from hydroelectric power. (The figure for Canada as a whole is nearly 70 per cent.) Its wet climate and mountainous terrain give it an abundance of fresh water. Massive man-made lakes have been created and forbidding concrete walls erected to tap the raging waters of the Columbia, Peace and Fraser Rivers. Total hydroelectric power potential is estimated to exceed 19 million kilowatts. Coal, oil and natural gas are also used in generating electric power. Rising energy consumption and prices have prompted government and the private sector to embark on conservation and renew-

able energy programs. The latter includes the use of wood wastes or biomass.

As might be expected, the province's manufacturing industry has largely developed on a resource base: forest products, refined non-ferrous metals, fish products and processed agricultural products. However, as in the rest of Canada, there has been a concerted effort to increase the role of secondary industry in the economy. The transportation equipment industries (particularly boats and trucks), chemical industries (fertilizers), machinery industries (relating to forestry and mining), and metal fabricating industries have all enjoyed substantial growth in recent years. Employment in the manufacturing sector is approximately 150,000. The major manufacturing centre of the province is the greater Vancouver/New Westminster area, with Vancouver Island ranking second.

The movement of goods to the large population centres of the south and to eastern and foreign markets is largely by road and rail. Much of B.C.'s 52,000 km of highways and 7,300 km of track lead to Vancouver, the province's largest city and the busiest Pacific port of the Americas. The port facilities handle 43.5 million metric tonnes yearly. Among the major commodities shipped from Vancouver are potash, sulphur, coal, grain, forest products and mineral concentrates.

British Columbia's location on the Pacific rim is a major factor in the province's trading patterns. The United States and Japan are its two leading export markets and sources of imports. The most important exports are lumber, pulp, newsprint, crude petroleum, natural gas, and refined non-ferrous metals. The United States is a prime customer for forestry machinery and Japan for resource products. Other Pacific rim countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are important markets for fish and forest products and equipment. The U.S. accounts for nearly 55 per cent of B.C. imports, most of which are manufactured goods.

British Columbia entered into the Canadian Confederation in 1871, four years after the British North America Act created the Dominion of Canada. Under the Act, matters of national concern (such as defence, trade and commerce) are under federal jurisdiction. The Act grants exclusive provincial jurisdiction in 16 specific areas such as education and civil and property rights. British Columbians are represented at the federal level by 28 members of Parliament and six senators and at the provincial level by 55 members of the Legislative Assembly. The provincial government consists of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Members of the

legislature are elected for a maximum of five years and the Executive Council (the Premier and Cabinet members) determines government policy and is responsible to the Assembly.

The province has had a colourful string of governments, stretching from the time of Amor de Cosmos to the recent 20-year tenure of the late W.A.C. Bennett, who in August 1952, led the Social Credit party into government. The Social Credit movement, begun in Alberta under the fiery stewardship of "Bible" Bill Aberhart, was based on the unorthodox monetary theories of Major Douglas, the founder of the movement in England.

Premier Bennett, however, never indulged in Social Credit's fiscal theories. Instead, he governed pragmatically, building extensive road and rail networks and two of the largest hydroelectric projects in North America. His government also introduced provincial hospital insurance and operated its own power distribution system, railway and ferry fleet.

The Bennett government was succeeded in office by a New Democratic Party government, democratic socialist in philosophy, led by Dave Barrett. The NDP government (in power from 1972 to 1975) introduced social policies in the area of health care, old age security, automobile insurance and housing. Another piece of legislation, the Land Commission Act, was introduced to arrest the loss of prime agricultural land to urban development and to encourage family farming and conservation.

The present government, again Social Credit, has devoted itself to sound financial management. It has presided over an economy which in 1978 had a gross domestic product of $25,413 million. Growth in the economy in 1978 was 4.2 per cent over the previous year, second only to that of Canada's oil-rich boom province of Alberta.

The B.C. logger, hardrock miner, fisherman, farmer and white collar worker are part of a labour force of 1,109,000. Some are also part of a long union tradition on the Coast, from the early coal miners to the International Woodworkers, United Fishermen, United Mine Workers and others of today. This tradition owes much to British trade unionism and has been an important factor in the development of a modern industrial society.

B.C.'s modernity is also reflected in its public education system. Over half a million students are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. Another 90,000 are enrolled (full- or part-time) in three universities and approximately 20 vocational training schools and community colleges. Simon Fraser University is housed in a modern archi-

tectural wonder perched on a mountaintop not far from Vancouver. Designed by Vancouver architect Arthur Erickson, it complements its magnificent setting and epitomizes the special character of British Columbia society in its openness to the surrounding natural space as well as to the future.

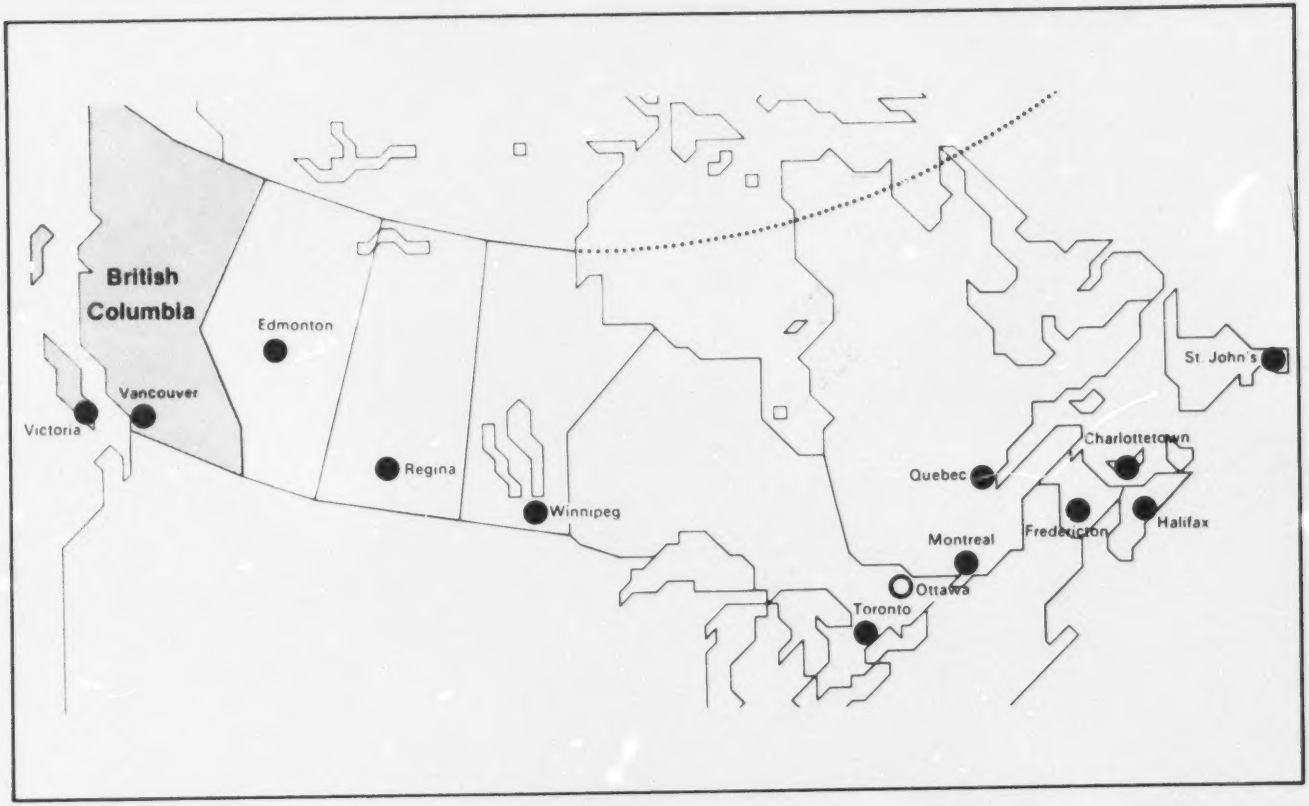
The society which produced Erickson also nurtured numerous other artists. The painter Emily Carr (1871 to 1945) was one of the foremost landscape painters and writers of her day. This reclusive and eccentric woman transferred to canvas the majesty and mystery of the Pacific rain forest and sang the praises of an earlier generation of artists and craftsmen, the Coast Indians, by painting their great heraldic poles.

It is perhaps significant that British Columbia was the birthplace of an influential literary magazine, *Canadian Literature*, which both chronicled and inspired the phenomenal renaissance in Canadian writing over the past two decades. This renaissance is also evident in other art forms in the Pacific province. Vancouver, for example, is the home of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Anna Wyman Dance Company (in the forefront of avant-garde dance) and the Vancouver Playhouse. Composer Murray Schafer, playwright George Ryga and painter Jack Shadbolt are three British Columbians whose artistic excellence has given them a prominent place in the country's cultural life.

British Columbia residents have also been known to boast that recreation there has been raised to an art. The province can claim a wealth of outdoor pursuits: hunting and fishing, hiking and climbing, boating and canoeing, alpine and cross-country skiing. There are nearly 350 provincial parks, and museums of every description dot the province.

* * *

On November 7, 1885, in the heart of the Rockies, the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railway was driven home by Donald Smith. To mark the occasion and this meeting place, Smith chose the name Craigellachie, the Gaelic word for hope and success. It is a fitting symbol for the province in which it is located.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